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What changed the meaning of Family?

People see family in different ways and from different point of views. A family can be built up with different members. In the stories “What is a Family” by Pauline Irit Erera, Children of Gay Fathers” by Robert L. Barret and Bryan E. Robinson, and “Cohabitation Instead of Marriage” by James Q. Wilson each give a different opinion on what truly makes up a family. Does a family consist of a gay couple with kids, or does it include extended family members that include grandparents, aunt and uncles. I will show how single moms with kids have also become known as being a family. In the world today the term family doesn’t really have a definition for it anymore, as you will see in the short stories comparison. So what is really considered a family?

In “What Is a Family” Erera stats that “White, Western, two-parented families have generally been what we compare all families too no matter what the culture, ethnicity, race, or class is. (417) Erera has written lots of books about family diversity that focused on different members of the family. “The early definition of what is a family was put out by George Peter Murdock in 1949”. His ideal family consists of adults of the opposite sex and two who relationship was approved by the society.”(418) In the short story Children of gay Fathers by Robert L. Barret and Bryan E. Robinson they talk about how gay fathers raised children. Barret is a professor of counseling at University of North Carolina, who is a gay father and grandfather of five grand kids. Robinson is a professor of counseling of special education and child development. Robinson had authored over twenty five books and also more than a 100 articles, (409) both of these authors -discuss how a family can consist of parents of the same sex and the children can still have a normal lifestyle. Barret and Robinson say that children of gay fathers are like children from other families.(410) Pauline Irit Erera who wrote “What is a Family” agrees that given the diversity a complete definition of family is hard to define because it depends on the purposes and circumstances. She explains how family is now made up of uncle, aunt, grandparents and also cousins. So a family could also include extended family members. (418) Erera also ask a question if a child can have more than one father or mother? Barret and Robinson say that “children who live with gay fathers must be prepared to face ridicule and harassment , Erera agree stating that “Women, minorities, lesbians, gays and nonconforming groups were subject to discrimination, and family problems got little attention or social assistance.” Another group included in the discrimination was African Americans who fought to keep rights more than trying to build a family. They both state that no matter what the minorities will usually have more harassment then a family that has parents of the opposite sex.

Erera states in “What is a family”, “that families challenge gender roles and influence gender typing by what they say and what they do.” Barret and Robinson agrees by saying that “As they try to merge their gayness with father role, they encounter a different conflict: deciding how open to be about their sexual relationships and how much exposure to the gay community to offer their children”. They both define how the roles of the parent in a family can be played out in some family cases where they father may be gay ends up struggling to play both roles in parenthood as the mother and the father. Barret and Robinson stats that study found that homosexual fathers differed from their heterosexual counterparts in providing more nurturing and in having less traditional parenting attitudes. (410) Wilson talks about in “Cohabitation instead of Marriage” how the affection and the companionship it entailed were valuable supports to family life”. While on the other hand Barret and Robinson says otherwise by stating that a gay father shows more affection and emotion when he comes out to the child can cause harm because of the fear of being rejected or fear of being hurt or damaging the child’s self-esteem. Gay parenting comes about in family because gay men and lesbians were divorces and ended up with custody of the child/children. Other gay or lesbians chose to give birth to the child within the lesbian/gay relationship that they have. Some of these gay families also tend to adopt a child. (420) In the world today there are fewer unwanted births and there are more white mothers keeping their child then there are African American women, therefore there are less white babies up for adoption. In some cases the people who adopt want to adopt a child of a different race. There has been a “growing acceptance of adoptive families, in turn, facilitated a greater acceptance of stepfamilies and other families not related by blood.”(420)

Erera explains the rise and decline of the traditional families. The meaning of family has been changing ever since the early 1900’s.Only about “three fifths of U.S households in the 1950’s actually fit the definition of family with a bread-winner-husband and a housewife”. The main reason for family change was the breakdown of the postwar social compact between government, corporation, and workers. (418) Wilson makes a very eye catching statement “ If marriage is designed to help solver a society’s need to maintain a family, and if modern societies such as ours have created ways of raising children that are independent of family life, then family life ought not to be very important.” (430) Erera then stat that does the availability of birth control pills and other methods along these line gave women control over reproduction, could these changes be the reason for not being married. The fact that acceptance of sexual behavior had become more common in society. She mentions does a family necessarily have to contain two adult, and do the adults have to be of the opposite sex. (420)

Wilson talks about how when cohabiting couples a child, custody have can easily be determined by one parent taking it. If the couple is married, however the custody of the child has to be taken up to the court of law and be determined by a judge. In this case the best interest in the custody will get the recognition. Cohabitation usually doesn’t last long, sometimes split within two years. In this case child custody would most likely happen if there is a kid involved. (430) Erera relates by saying that some kids are being fostered by their grandmothers, reasons being for this is divorce, parents not being able to take care or even imprisonment. “Increasingly, grandmothers are assuming responsibility for raising their grandchildren. Though this case does happen there do become a lot of single mothers out there. Although Erera shows attack she also restated how maybe the fathers should restore their rightful roles as a father. Erera speaks on how single mother struggles trying to raise a family on her own. (420) While Wilson explains how many cohabitation women usually value their career and they see being married or single helps there career in some way. He also informs that a man thinks cohabitation helps them spend more time with the boys. It might not make sense but he informs us that no matter what these relationships usually don’t last. (431)

Diverse families challenge and can change our definition of what is a family. It makes us rethink question like is family defined by genes and blood relationship? Do family members have to share the same residence or share emotions with one another, and physical support, caring, and love? (418) Notice how families our made up with different members leaving it with no real definition of what a family really is. Different writers tell us what they consider a family really is. As I stated before what really makes up a family?

Work Cited

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